Learning to foster autonomy: The role of teacher education materials

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Date
2011-03-31


Permanent link to Research Bank record:
https://hdl.handle.net/10652/2500

Abstract

In recent years there has been an increased appreciation of the interrelationship between learner autonomy and teacher autonomy, both in the classroom and in the self-access centre.

One obvious impact on learners’ autonomy is their teachers’ understanding of what autonomy means, and their ability to implement it in the classroom. Especially for beginning teachers, knowledge of learner autonomy is likely to be shaped in large part by the professional training they receive and the amount of attention given to the topic during their teacher education. It is therefore important to ask to what extent teacher training courses prepare teachers for fostering autonomy, including those teachers working in self-access centres. This study attempts to answer that question by critically investigating a range of popular teacher training course materials widely used in professional programmes worldwide. We apply an evaluative framework to identify 1) what information teachers are given about learner autonomy, and 2) the extent to which the materials cover the teaching of different skills for independent learning. Perhaps surprisingly, despite the growing interest in autonomy, it was found that the selected books included almost no information about learner autonomy at all and did not, with one or two minor exceptions, focus on the development of skills for supporting autonomous learning.

Keywords: learner autonomy, teacher autonomy, teacher education, teacher education resources

ANZSRC Field of Research: 130207 LOTE, ESL and TESOL Curriculum and Pedagogy (excl. Māori)

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